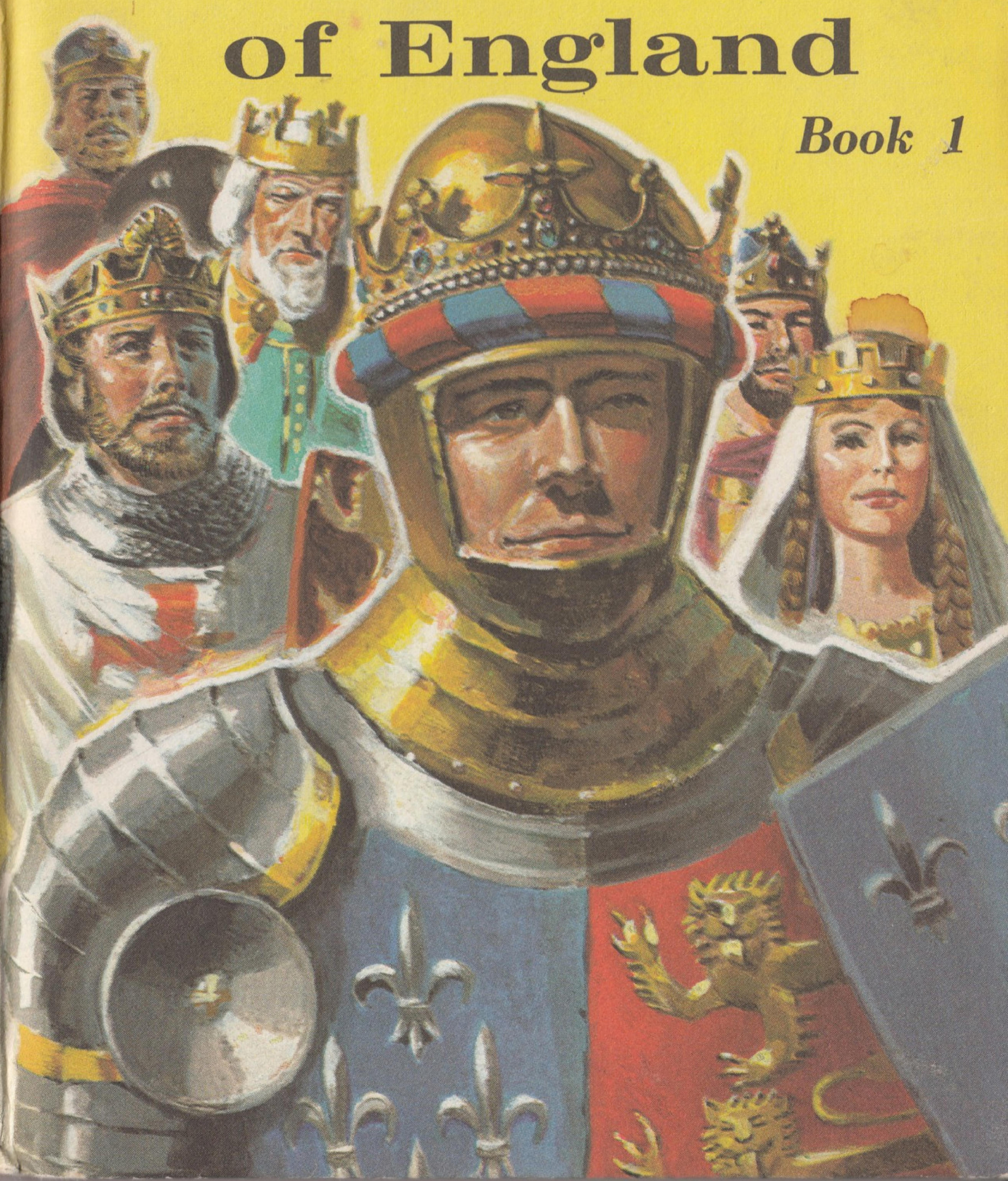
A LADYBIRD BOOK



Kings and Queens of England

Book 1



The reigns of the kings and queens in this book cover more than six hundred years, from the accession of the Saxon King Alfred to the death of Richard III at the battle of Bosworth.

It would require a large history book to tell in detail all *the things which happened in England during these six hundred years: wars, revolutions, struggles between king and parliament, treaties and alliances all affected the course of history. More than once England was in danger; more than once English armies occupied large areas in Europe.*

However, these happenings did not always affect greatly the lives of the ordinary people of England. Most of them were farmers, living far from such little towns as then existed. Here and there some village lad would come back with stories of the French wars, or some wandering pedlar or friar brought news of far-away happenings.

That was all the people living in the wide spaces of the countryside knew of the world beyond. Age after age the countryman was content with the life of his ancestors. Kings and queens came and went, but the ploughing and the harvesting went on.

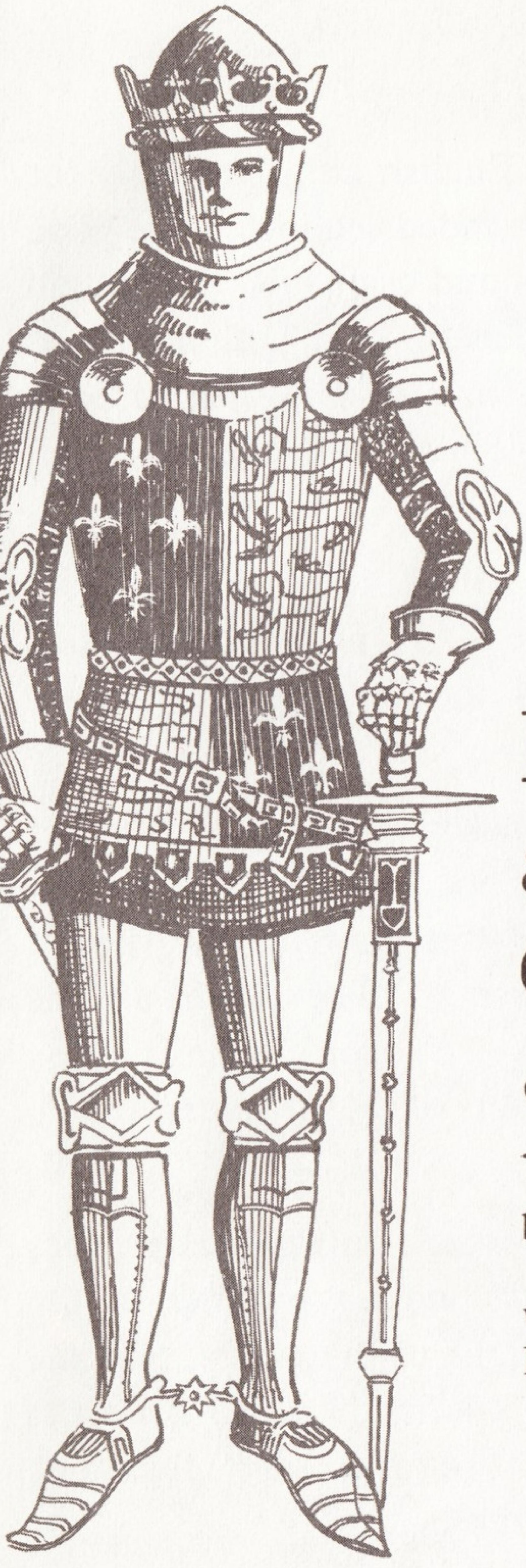


Series 561

A Ladybird History Book

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Book 1

Kings and Queens of England

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with illustrations by
FRANK HAMPSON

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Alfred the Great 871-901

Alfred was the first great English king, probably the greatest in our history. He founded schools, made good laws, and encouraged artists and craftsmen. He fought and defeated the Danish raiders on land, and built ships to fight them at sea, often visiting the shipyards to make sure that the ships were properly and carefully constructed.

The people over whom Alfred ruled were Anglo-Saxons from what is now Germany, and who had come to Britain and conquered a country left defenceless after the departure of the Roman legions.

Alfred's capital was the ancient town of Winchester, but the Anglo-Saxons did not seem to like towns. Many of those built by the Romans had, by Alfred's time, become grass-grown ruins. The Anglo-Saxons liked to settle in family groups, in open clearings in the woods or near streams, with their fields and cattle around them.

An Anglo-Saxon house was really only one large room in which everybody lived, including very often the cattle. The fire was on an open hearth in the centre, and the smoke went out through a hole in the roof. Even the Anglo-Saxon noblemen lived in this way: the poor peasants had only very miserable huts.

King Alfred sends England's first fleet against the Danes.

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Edward the Elder 901-924
Athelstan 924-940
Edmund the Elder 940-946

Alfred made a treaty with the Danes, allowing them to live peacefully in England, north of the Roman road called Watling Street which runs from London to Chester. Soon the Danes broke the peace, raiding and burning farms on the border, and Edward, together with his warlike sister Ethelfleda, marched against them with an army, capturing many of their towns.

Fighting with the Danes continued during the reigns of Edward's two sons, one of whom, Athelstan, won a great victory over them at a place called Brananburg. The other, Edmund the Elder, won from the Danes the Five Boroughs of Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham, Stamford, and Derby.

In these early days all houses were made of wood and a sort of plaster. Large trees were cut down and roughly shaped. Very often a bent tree was chosen, and sawn in half lengthways. The two halves were then set up so that they met in a point at the top, forming an arch. Two such arches, side by side a few yards apart, made the framework of a house.

The walls were made of other tree trunks woven together with branches and covered with clay. The roofs were thatched.

Danish chiefs submitting to Athelstan after the battle of Brananburg.



Edred 946-955
Edwy 955-959
Edgar 959-975

Edred was not a strong fighting man like Edmund. His reign is chiefly notable because he chose the cleverest man in England, the Abbot Dunstan, to be his adviser. Edwy, the next King, quarrelled with Dunstan and banished him, but Edgar recalled the man whose wise policy made England peaceful, and united it as one country. Edgar was recognised as the 'Ruler and Lord of the whole Isle of Albion', meaning England, by eight Welsh and Scottish kings.

The Anglo-Saxons lived mostly in villages or on their farms. Such towns as there were, were little bigger than large villages of today.

The villages were built round an open village green, often with a pond in the middle. The large room of each house was used for everything connected with the farm, including threshing out the corn. It is from this ancient custom that we get the word 'threshold' for the entrance to a house.

There was very little furniture, even in the houses of the nobles; just a rough table with a few stools and forms were enough. As the Anglo-Saxons could only light their houses with torches or very poor candles, they mostly went to bed at dark, and got up at dawn.

King Edwy banishes Dunstan.



Edward the Martyr 975-978
Ethelred the Unready 978-1016
Edmund Ironside 1016-1017

When Edgar died, the throne passed to two young boys. Edward, the elder, was murdered when he was sixteen, and Ethelred the Unready, which means "the badly advised", was only ten when he became King. During the years that he reigned, the Danes ravaged England from coast to coast. He was succeeded by Edmund, who was forced to make a treaty with the Danish King Canute, after being defeated at the battle of Assandune.

The eating habits of the Anglo-Saxons did not change during the hundred years following Alfred. Food was rough but plentiful for most of the people. They grew what they ate, and practically no food came from other countries as it does today.

One of the most important men in any village was the bee-keeper. Sugar was unknown, and all sweetening had to be done by using honey.

The Anglo-Saxons were great meat eaters. Their drink was mead, which was also made from honey. An Anglo-Saxon meal would seem to us a very rough affair. It would also seem very messy: there was plenty to eat, but nothing to eat it with except fingers. Everybody carried a knife, but there were no forks, and only rough wooden spoons.

The boy King Ethelred at a banquet.



Canute 1017–1035
Harold I (died 1040)
Hardicanute 1035–1042

Edmund was assassinated within a year, and Canute the Dane was chosen King of all England by a gathering of noblemen. Canute was King of both Norway and Denmark, but he liked best to live in England, and he became in his manner and habits more English than Danish. For sixteen years England was peaceful, and the people grew wealthy.

Unfortunately, Canute was succeeded by two worthless sons, Harold and Hardicanute, who taxed and plundered their British subjects. During the next seven years the condition of the people of England became more and more wretched.

At this time there were fewer people in the whole of England than live in any large city today. They were mostly farmers, and they ploughed the land in long, unfenced strips. The strips were all of the same length, and each was known as 'one furrow long', a furrow being about one eighth of a mile. From this we get the word 'furlong'.

The Anglo-Saxons grew corn and made bread and cakes sweetened with honey. They drank out of drinking horns, which were made out of the horns of cattle and which were often carved and decorated with silver rims.

King Canute reproves his foolish courtiers who had flattered him by saying that even the sea would obey him.



Edward the Confessor 1042–1066

Canute had granted Wessex to a Saxon noble, Earl Godwin, who had become very powerful. It was he who now brought back Edward, the son of Ethelred, who had taken refuge in Normandy during the reign of Canute. So a descendant of Alfred the Great was again on the throne of England. But Edward was simple and pious, ill-fitted to rule. Having been brought up in Normandy, he spoke the Norman language, and surrounded himself with Norman favourites.

Many new things had started to come into England by the overland route through Russia, goods from Constantinople and the East. Amongst them were silks and spices, gems and ornaments of gold such as England had never seen before.

In the heart of London is Westminster Abbey. It was Edward the Confessor who founded it, and it was consecrated in 1065. Edward died the following year, and on Christmas Day, William of Normandy was the first King of England to be crowned in it.

The Abbey was largely rebuilt by Henry III, and little is left of the original building. But it is here, in the Collegiate Church of St. Peter in Westminster, which Edward founded, that every English monarch since 1066 has been crowned.

King Edward watching the building of Westminster Abbey.



Harold II 1066

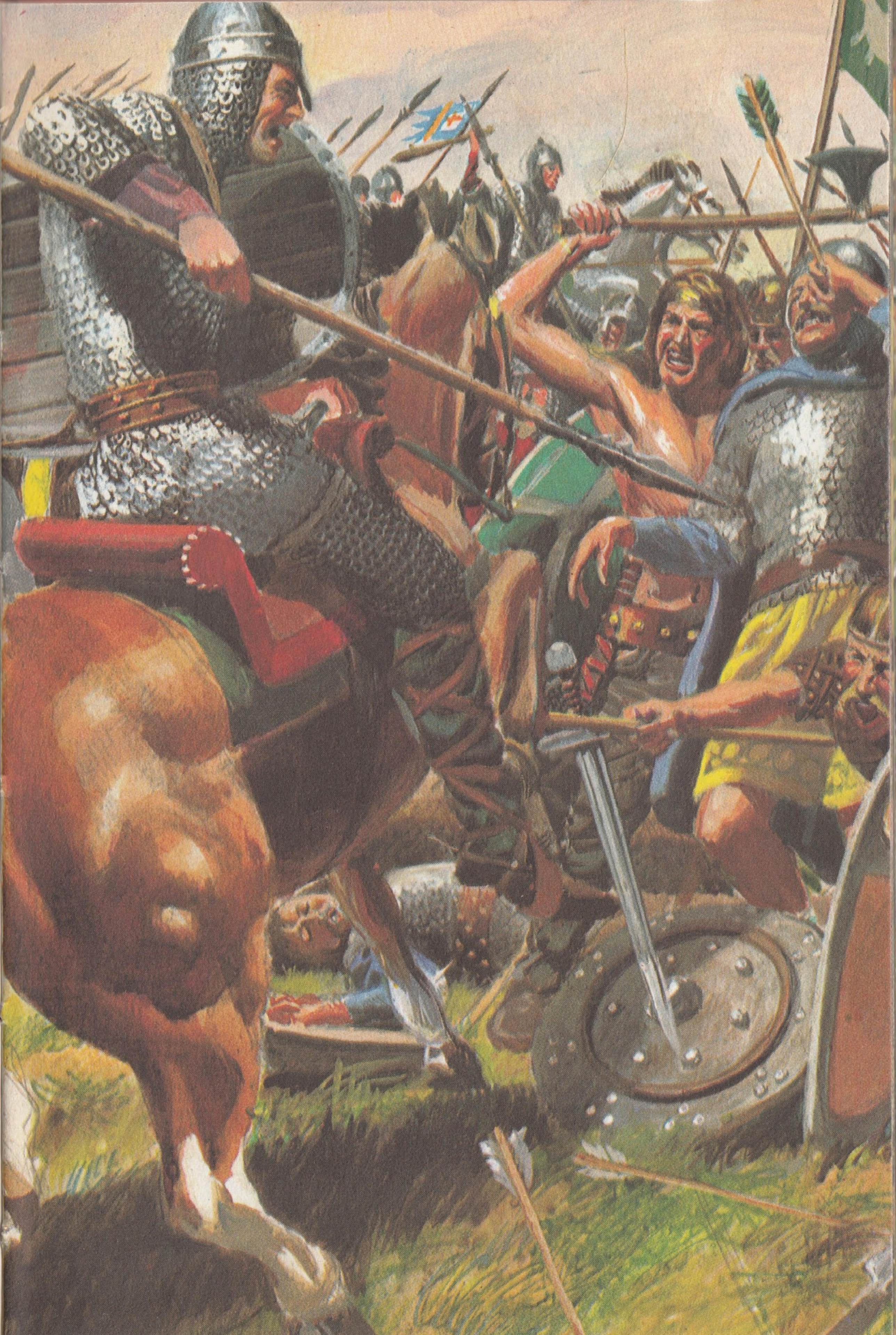
Harold, the son of Earl Godwin, succeeded his father as the most powerful man in the country. When King Edward died, Harold was at once chosen King by the gathering of nobles and prelates who supported him. This was in January of the year 1066, a fatal year for Harold and for England.

In his short reign Harold had to meet two invasions, one, in the north, by King Hardrada of Norway, and another immediately afterwards, by Duke William of Normandy, two hundred and fifty miles to the south.

Hardrada was slain in a battle near York, but on October 14th, at the battle of Hastings, Harold was killed by an arrow in his eye. This was the end of Anglo-Saxon England.

The Anglo-Saxons were a hardy race and good fighters. Their weapons were spears and swords and particularly heavy battle-axes. Good examples of these, often decorated with curious designs, are to be seen in many museums. Good as the Anglo-Saxons and the anglicised Danes were, they were no match for the heavily armed knights in armour who came over from Normandy with Duke William. After the battle of Hastings many things changed in England, including in a few years, the English language.

The death of King Harold at Hastings.



William the Conqueror 1066-1087

William, Duke of Normandy, was now the conqueror of England, and on Christmas Day 1066, he rode through a snowstorm to Westminster Abbey to be crowned. Today there remain many things for which William was responsible; among them the Tower of London, which he built, and the Domesday Book in which all the towns and villages and people of England were registered. During his reign he gave to the country a strong central government.

When picturing to ourselves Harold and his army marching south from York to meet the invasion by William, we must remember that in those days a great part of the country consisted of thick forest or marshy swamps. The good roads which the Romans had built hundreds of years earlier had been neglected and were mostly in a very bad state of repair.

People travelled on horseback or on foot. Such coaches as there were, even those in which kings and queens travelled, were like clumsy farm carts with no springs. Often it required six or eight horses to drag them through the deep mud.

Some of the bridges built by the Romans may still have been in use, but many of the rivers could only be crossed by fords.

BERCHES CIRE

William II (Rufus) 1087–1100

William II, who was known as William Rufus because of his ruddy complexion, was a strong king. He kept the unruly barons in order, and resisted the growing power of the Church. He forced the Scottish king to pay homage to him, and pacified South Wales. But he was harsh to the common people of England, and men were savagely punished for small offences: it is not surprising that he was mysteriously killed by an arrow whilst hunting in the New Forest.

The clothes worn by the ordinary people of England had changed very little since the time of Alfred. The men still wore long tunics and loose, cross-gartered trousers. All they wanted was to keep as warm and as dry as possible whilst working in their fields.

With the coming of the Normans, more elaborate clothes, as worn by the Norman nobles and their families, were introduced into England. The pictures which follow will show what they were like.

We must remember that England had been divided between the Norman followers of William the Conqueror, so that most of those who now owned land were from France, spoke French, and brought a French way of life into the country.

Death of King William in the New Forest.



Henry I 1100–1135

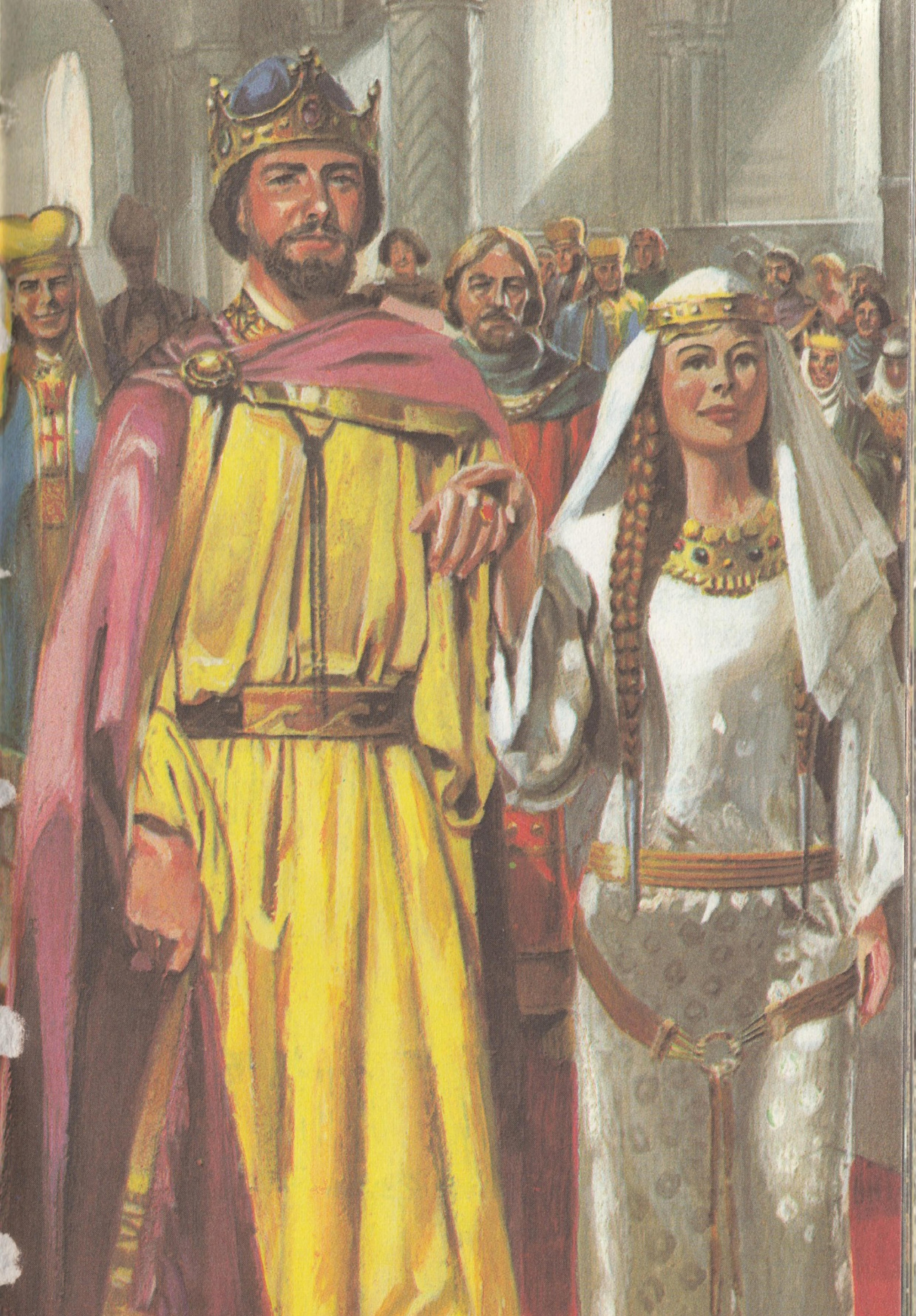
Henry was the younger brother of William Rufus. The rightful heir to the throne was his elder brother, Robert, but Robert was away on a crusade, and Henry had himself proclaimed King before he returned.

Henry ruled the country wisely and well. He set up law courts and made people respect them, he improved the coinage, and he pleased the common people, who were Anglo-Saxons, by marrying a direct descendant of Alfred the Great.

This marriage of Henry with Eadgyth, renamed Matilda by the Normans, is important in our history because it means that our present Queen, Elizabeth II, is descended from the ancient Saxon Royal House.

During this reign, the Normans and the Anglo-Saxons started the slow process of becoming one people. A common language was spoken, consisting of both French and Anglo-Saxon words, and we still use both. Such words as sheep, cow, calf, and so on, are Anglo-Saxon, and mutton, beef and veal are from the French. This is perhaps because the Anglo-Saxon peasants looked after the animals when they were alive, and the Normans ate them when they were cooked!

The marriage of King Henry I and Matilda.



Stephen 1135–1154

Stephen was a nephew of Henry I and was elected King because Henry's only son had been drowned at sea. Stephen was good-natured and friendly, and the people liked him, but he was an unfortunate king because he was unable to keep the barons in order. The law was disregarded and the common people suffered much misery.

Henry had wished his daughter Matilda to reign after him, and many of the barons, who only wanted an excuse to make war on their neighbours, took up arms on her behalf. Stephen was captured, but later released, only to rule no more wisely than before.

Much of the misery of the country was due to the fact that Stephen had debased the coinage. This means that a gold or silver coin did not contain enough gold or silver to equal its face value.

In these days, when we use so much paper money, and our coins are only tokens, this does not matter. In Stephen's time a man's wealth consisted of the actual amount of gold or silver in the coins in his possession. There were no banks, and people kept their money at home in strong iron-bound chests with very complicated locks.

King Henry's son William drowned in a shipwreck.



Henry II 1154–1189

Henry II inherited a poor country, ruined by civil war and reduced to misery and suffering. Although only twenty-one, he was wise and energetic. He soon disarmed the barons and made people once more respect the law.

By reason of his French possessions, he made England respected abroad, and no-one could defy him at home because of the large numbers of French soldiers he commanded.

Henry's chief adviser was Thomas à Becket, the son of the portreeve, or mayor, of London. Becket served the king well. Unfortunately Henry had him appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, hoping thereby to rule the Church as well as the country. But Becket became the champion of the Church against the king. "Will none of the knaves eating my bread rid me of this turbulent priest!" shouted Henry. Four of his followers took him at his word and murdered Becket in Canterbury Cathedral.

During the whole of this period the monasteries played a large and important part in the life of the country. The monks were good farmers and brought much of the waste land of England under cultivation. They kept learning alive and sheltered scholars, artists, and craftsmen, as well as providing food and shelter for travellers.

The murder of Thomas à Becket.

Richard I 1189–1199

Richard I, known as Richard the Lion Heart because of his personal courage, succeeded to the throne after having been in open rebellion against his father, Henry II.

Richard was a bad king for England. During his reign of ten years he spent only a few months in his kingdom, and visited it only to raise money for the Crusades, the name given to military expeditions the object of which was to capture the Holy Land from the Mohammedans. Although Richard was a good soldier and a successful leader, he never succeeded in capturing Jerusalem.

The Crusades took thousands of soldiers to the far shores of the Mediterranean, and people also began to make pilgrimages to Rome or Jerusalem. This meant that the people of England began to know a lot more about things from foreign countries. Fine silks and brocades, jewels and spices and rare wines appeared in the rough baronial castles. Eastern rugs and carpets were laid on the stone floors, and tapestries hung on the walls.

Commerce with the East encouraged men to look for trade in other directions, and soon women were wearing delicate lace from Flanders and furs from the far Baltic.

Richard I leading the third Crusade in 1191.

John 1199–1216

John is remembered in our history as the king who was forced by the barons to affix his seal to Magna Charta, a copy of which may be seen in the Record Office in London. This did not give to the people any new rights, but contained a list of all those granted since the days of Alfred and taken away by King John. In the Great Charter he promised faithfully to keep to them in future.

John was not a good king, but because of Magna Charta his reign is one of the most important in our history.

Many other charters were granted during the reigns of Richard and John. These were to the little towns, some of which have grown into great cities, while some remain only large villages. But all still enjoy the rights granted in their charters.

In all, about two hundred and fifty charters date from these two reigns. This is because both kings were always in need of money, and were ready to sell a charter to any town willing to pay for it. King Richard had even said that he was willing to sell London if anybody would offer a fair price for it.

King John and the signing of the draft of Magna Charta at Runnymede in 1215.



Henry III 1216–1272

Henry III was only nine years old when he became King, and for eleven years the country was governed by men who utterly disregarded the promised rights in Magna Charta, which they themselves had forced King John to sign.

When Henry came of age he proved to be a weak king. He was pious and vain, and the people hated and despised him. He allowed himself to be governed by the foreign relations of his wife, and finally the barons revolted. The foreigners were driven out, and a Parliament of Englishmen summoned to govern the country.

This Parliament is important because it was the first in which ordinary men were allowed to take part. It was summoned by a man named Simon de Montfort, and he not only summoned two knights from each shire, but also two citizens from each town.

It was during the long reign of Henry III that the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were established. They were very different from today. There were no stately buildings. We read of thousands of poor boys taught by men as poor as themselves, and spending much of their time drinking, quarrelling, and begging at street corners, defying the bailiffs and all authority.

Simon de Montfort forces the captive King Henry III to summon England's first real Parliament.



Edward I 1272–1307

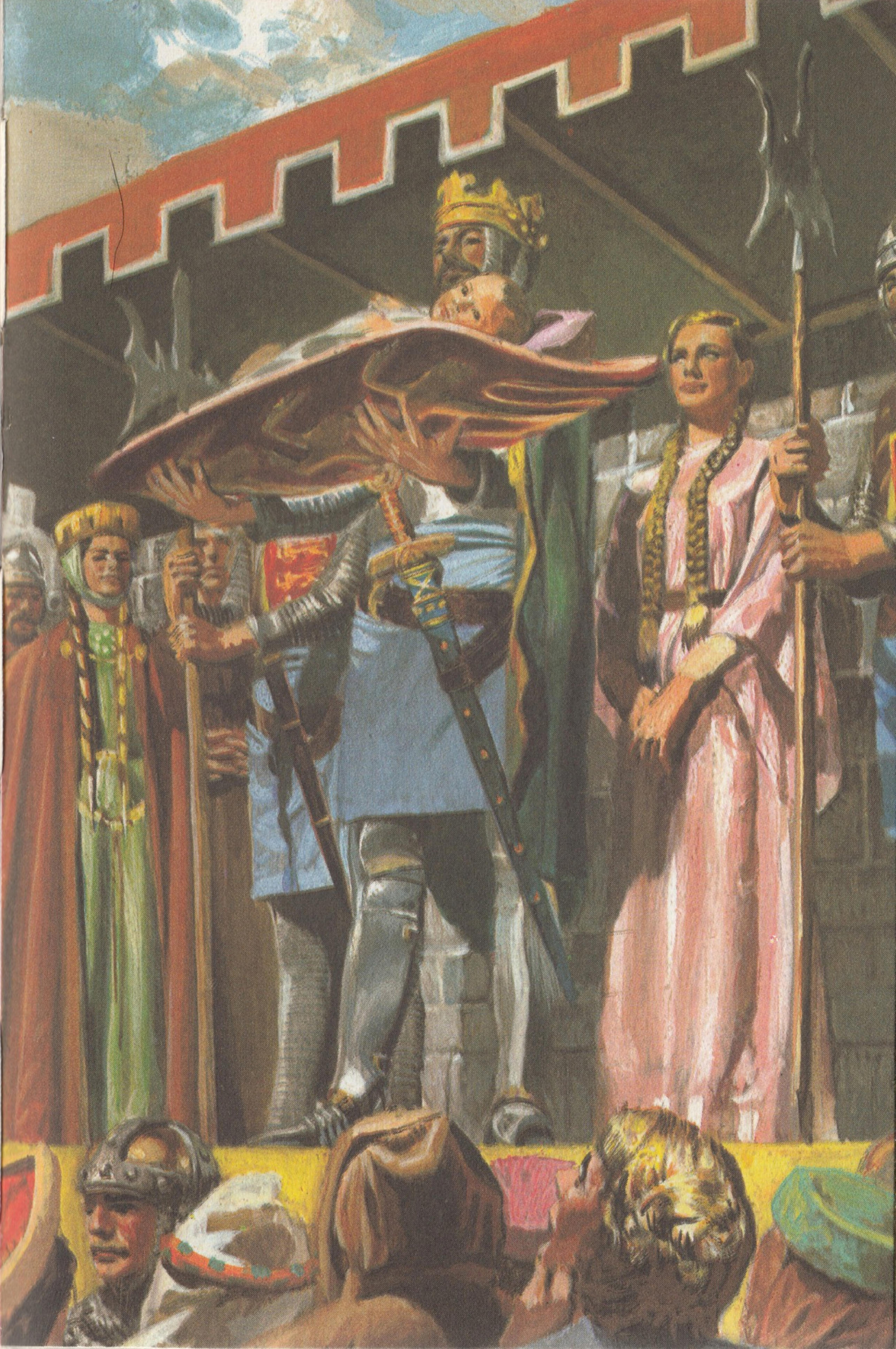
Edward I was, next to Alfred, the greatest of our kings. He strengthened the authority of Parliament and enforced the law. As a soldier he was justly famous. He became known as the Hammer of the Scots after the battle of Dunbar, and he put down rebellion in Wales. It was after this that he promised to give to the Welsh a prince born in Wales and who could speak no English. The legend tells us that he presented to them his baby son, born at Caernarvon, who was not old enough to speak at all.

At a time when there were no large multiple shops, and when roads were so bad that travelling from one place to another was difficult, markets and fairs were important.

It was during the time when the little towns were being granted their charters that they also obtained permission to hold markets and fairs.

The borough charter meant that the people of the town could elect a mayor and themselves manage their own local affairs. It was because most of the towns and boroughs were well governed by honest and responsible citizens, that Simon de Montfort was able to find men to represent them in Parliament.

King Edward I presenting the child Prince of Wales.



Edward II 1307-1327

Edward II was very different from his warlike father. He was idle and fond of pleasure, and soon the barons were doing very much as they pleased. Edward was wise enough to summon Parliament, and so won the people to his side for a time, but his reign was one of trouble and uncertainty.

In Scotland, Edward II lost all that Edward I had won, and after the defeat of the English at Bannockburn, Scotland again became a separate and independent kingdom.

Markets and fairs continued to be granted. The markets were held regularly, sometimes every week, and were very much like the markets held in English country towns and villages today. The farmers brought their butter and eggs and cheese, and bought and sold sheep and cattle.

The fairs were only held once or twice a year, and were enlarged markets with all sorts of shows and amusements added. Wandering quack doctors pulled out teeth or sold simple medicines, and fortune-tellers, minstrels and acrobats attracted audiences of simple people. Edward I granted two fairs to Nottingham, and later under Queen Anne the famous Goose Fair was started. Other ancient fairs have remained and are still held to this day.

A quack doctor pulling teeth at a fair.



Edward III 1327-1377

Edward III has been called the 'Father of English Commerce'. He encouraged trade at home and abroad, and settled foreign workers in England. The reign of Edward III is also important because Parliament was first divided into two Houses, the Lords and the Commons, and no taxes were to be raised without their consent.

Edward claimed to be the rightful King of France, which involved England in the Hundred Years War. The battle of Creçy was fought and won in 1346: the Scots were defeated at Nevilles Cross in the same year. It was at Creçy that the English long-bow was first used with terrible effect on the French knights in armour.

Two years later the dreadful plague of the Black Death came to England, and half the population died. The king and his court left London, and towns and villages became almost deserted.

Up to about the middle of Edward's reign the language used in the Law Courts had been Norman-French. But the common people still spoke the English which had developed from Anglo-Saxon. From now on English was used in all Courts of Law, and the first great English poet, Chaucer, wrote in a language which we can understand today.

The battle of Creçy.



Richard II 1377-1399

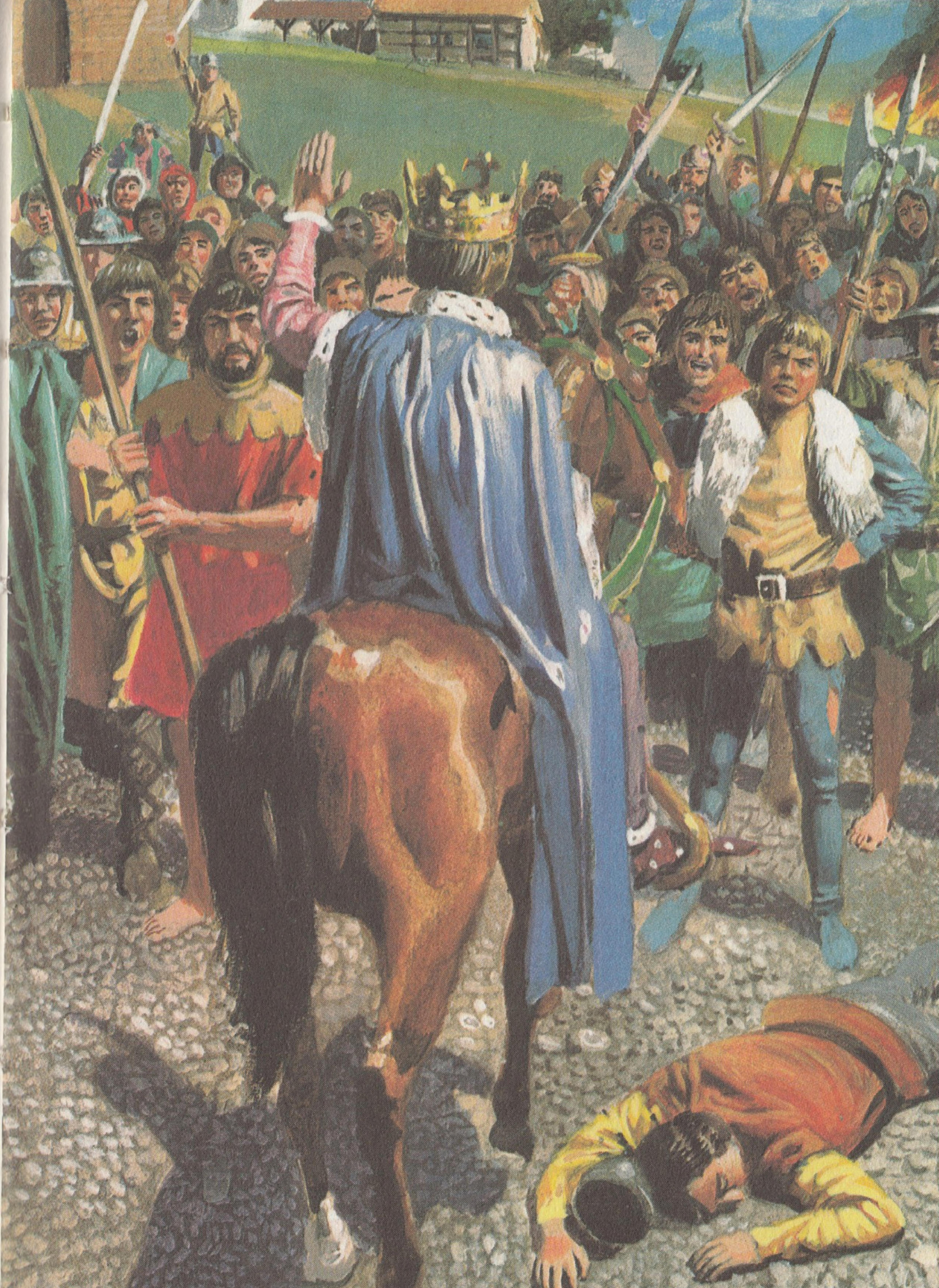
Richard II was only ten years old when he came to the throne, and the country was under the control of his uncle, John of Gaunt. The long war with France and the Black Death had made the country poor, and people everywhere were discontented. Soon, large numbers of rebellious peasants were marching on London. They seized the city, burning the great palace of John of Gaunt.

The young King rode out to parley with them. Suddenly there was a scuffle, and their leader, Wat Tyler, was killed. The King immediately rode up to the shouting, furious mob and cried, "Your leader is killed – I will be your leader!" The situation was saved by the courage of a boy of fifteen.

Life in England at that time was not all fighting and rebellion. We read of many sports in which people took part. Wrestling and boxing were popular, and on every village green the butts were set up, and prizes given for skill in archery.

This skill in shooting with the long-bow was to give England many victories in the French wars, until finally the use of guns and gunpowder replaced it, and the butts disappeared from the village greens.

The boy King Richard II facing the mob.



Henry IV 1399–1413

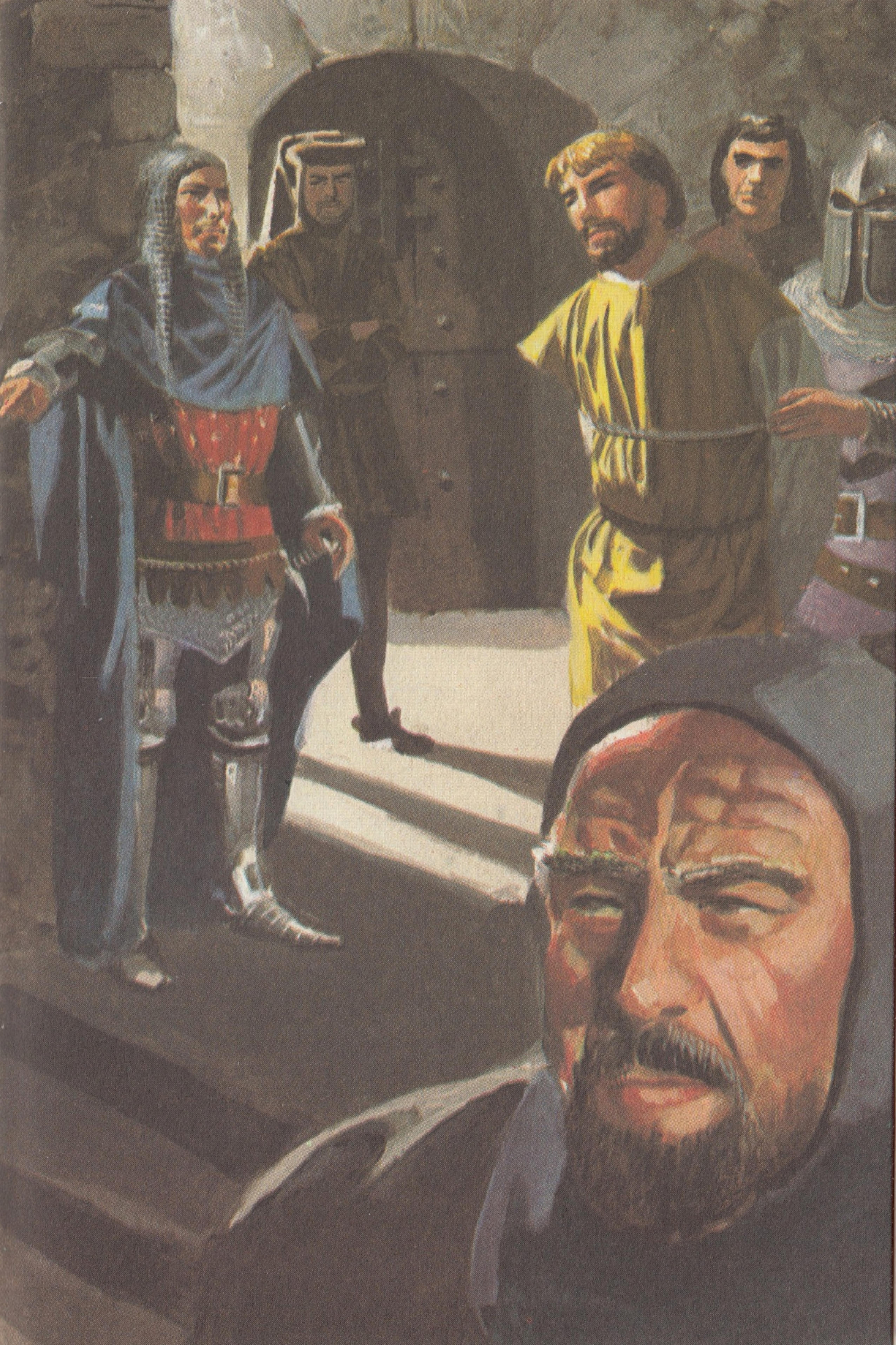
Although Richard had been popular at the beginning of his reign, he became cruel and ruthless. When his cousin, Henry, the son of John of Gaunt, landed in England and claimed the throne, Richard had few friends to support him. He was forced to abdicate, and was most probably murdered in the grim castle at Pontefract. Henry IV was crowned King.

His reign was a troubled one. One after another, rebellions broke out against him, and each was followed by savage executions. All the good that can be said of him is that he encouraged artists and men of letters.

This was the period when the Guilds became powerful. These were really the far-off beginnings of the Trades Unions of today, except that they existed chiefly to see that their members produced honest goods. They also saw to it that all work at each particular trade was done by members of the trade Guild and no-one else.

What is today called demarcation was common: for instance a man who made bows was not allowed to make arrows, and it even required two men to make a bow, a bowyer who made the bow, and a stringer who fitted the cord.

The murder of Richard II at Pontefract.



Henry V 1413-1422

The name of Henry V will always be associated with Agincourt, the battle in which about six thousand English archers gained a great victory over more than thirty thousand French knights. This was the result of those long hours of practice with bows and arrows at the butts on the village greens of England.

Henry was a popular king although he persecuted those who did not accept the teaching of the Catholic Church. He enlarged the Navy and made England strong at sea and on land.

Life was still rough and uncomfortable compared with the way in which ordinary people live today. Even the castles of the nobility were lit at night only with torches or candles. There were sports and so-called amusements, like the cruel bull or bear-baiting, but there were as yet no regular theatres.

The beginnings of our modern theatres existed in the simple plays which were performed on large waggons, drawn through the streets. These plays were acted by members of the Guilds, and told stories from the Bible, or of the lives of the saints. Others were about the fight between good and evil in the world and, needless to say, the good always won.

King Henry V at the battle of Agincourt.



Henry VI 1422-1461

Henry VI was only nine months old when he became king, and he grew up to be simple-minded, and sometimes quite mad. This was unfortunate for England : it was a time when a strong king was needed.

Abroad, everything that Henry V had won was lost, except Calais. The French were everywhere victorious, led by a French peasant girl, Joan of Arc. Joan was later betrayed to the English, who executed her at Rouen. At home, because there was another descendant of Edward III with a claim to the throne, this reign saw the beginning of the Wars of the Roses.

Henry was pious and interested in education. It was he who founded the famous school of Eton in the year 1440 and, a year later, King's College, Cambridge, already a University town since 1226.

This was a time when schools and colleges were being founded in various parts of the country. Eton was of course very different from the school of today. Its original foundation was for twenty-five poor boys. The sons of the rich nobles did not go to schools. They were educated by tutors, usually the priest attached to the great house of the family.

The execution of Joan of Arc in the market place at Rouen.



Edward IV 1461-1483

Edward, Duke of York, like Henry VI a descendant of Edward III, claimed the throne after the defeat of Henry's army. He captured London, and was crowned as Edward IV whilst Henry VI was still the legal king. There is little doubt that after the battle of Tewkesbury, Henry VI was poisoned in the Tower of London.

Edward IV was a handsome young man, brave, popular, and a good ruler. He encouraged trade and was the patron of Caxton, the first English printer.

Probably no invention by man has been so important in the history of the world, as the invention of printing. Before it was invented, all books were copied out by hand, and as this meant that the number was necessarily limited, few people troubled to learn to read.

William Caxton was an English merchant living abroad. Whilst in Cologne he learnt the craft of printing. Returning to England, he set up a printing press in the Almonry at Westminster, and there produced the first book to be printed in England, in the year 1476. Caxton printed about ninety-nine books at his Westminster press. These books, printed in heavy old-English type, are now very rare and valuable.

King Edward IV visiting Caxton's printing press.



Edward V 1483
Richard III 1483–1485

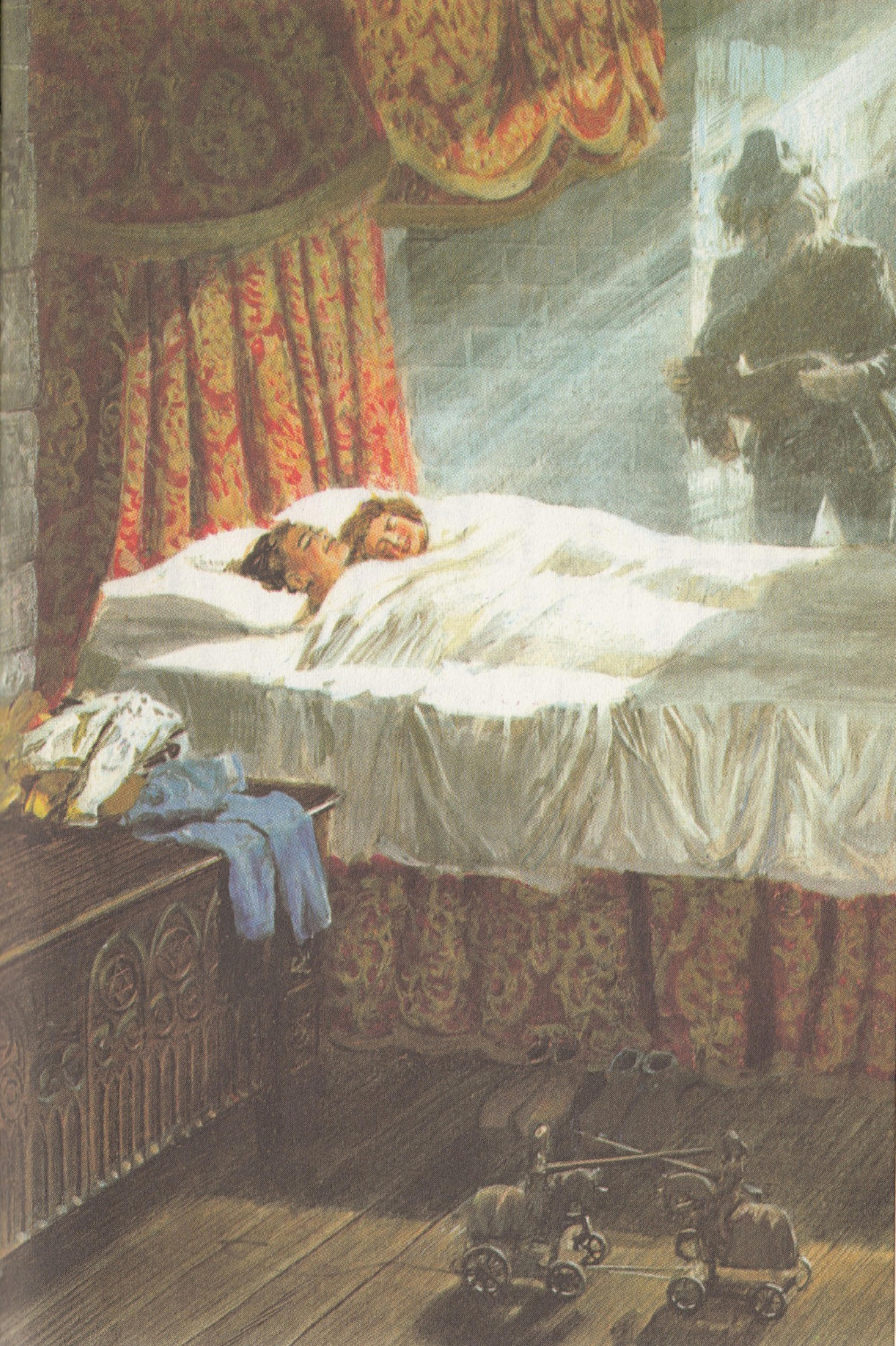
When Edward died at the age of forty-two, his son was a boy of thirteen. He was the rightful heir to the throne as Edward V, but he was never crowned. Instead, he was imprisoned in the Tower of London by his uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester. He never left it. He and his brother were both mysteriously murdered.

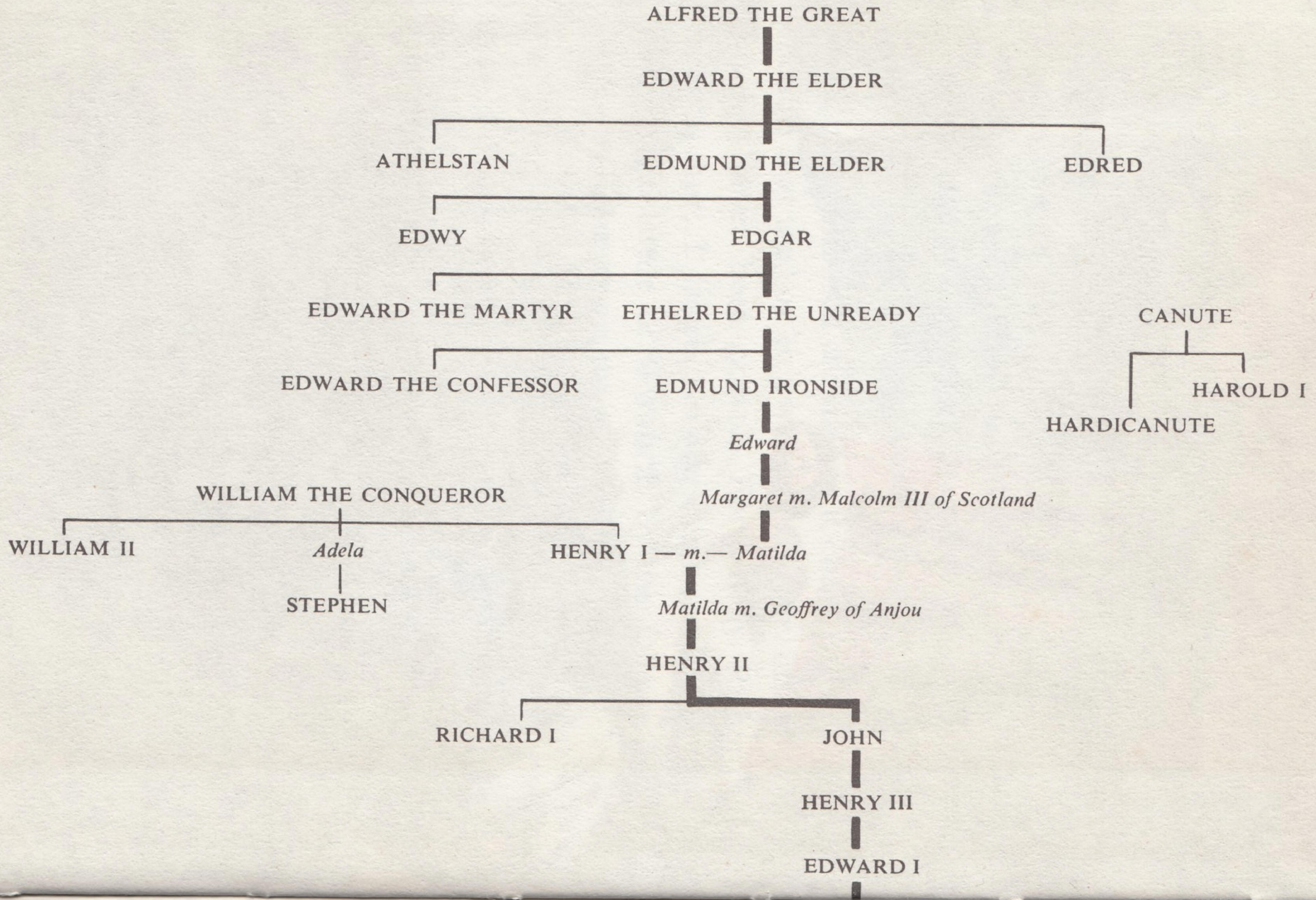
Richard had himself crowned as Richard III, and it is probable that the boy king was murdered by his orders. This has never been proved. Fortunately Richard's reign was short. It lasted two years, ending when he was killed at the battle of Bosworth by the followers of another claimant to the throne, Henry Tudor.

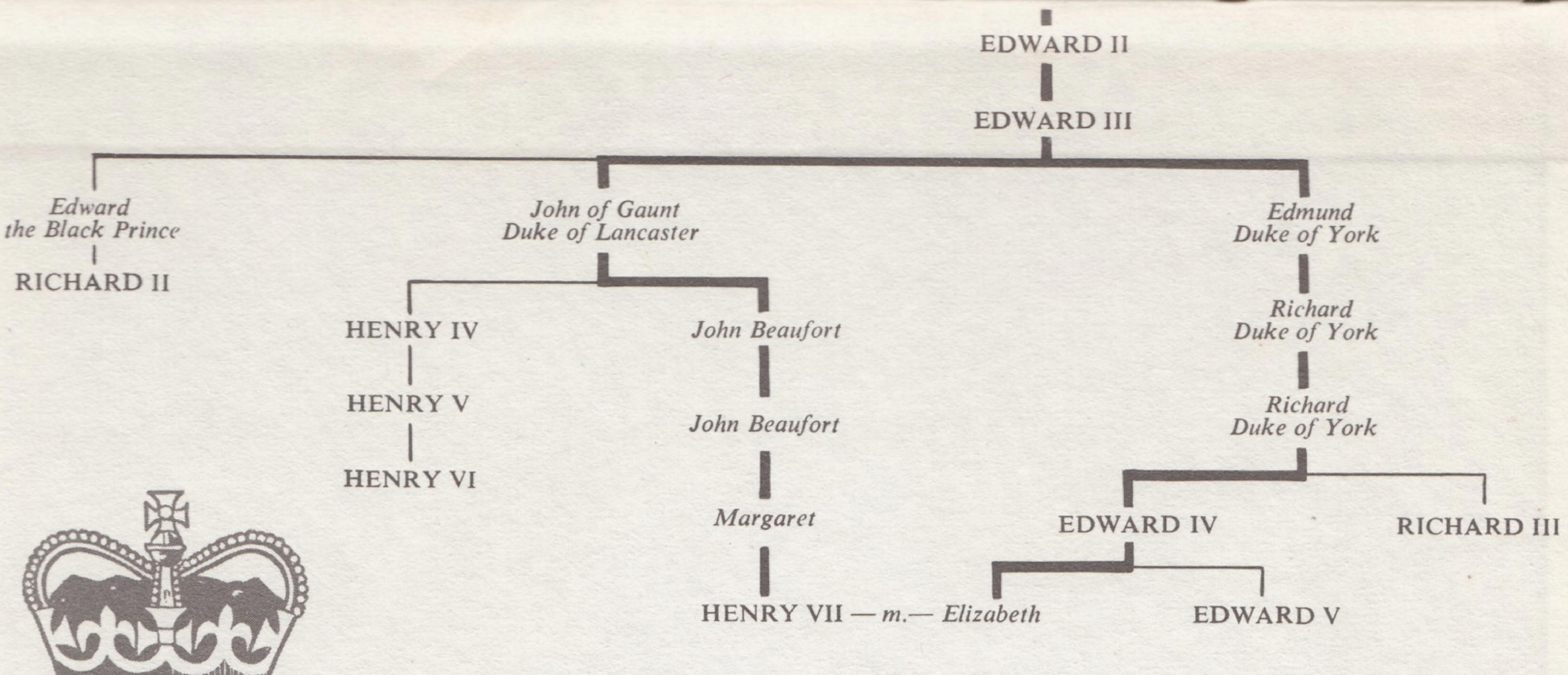
With the death of Richard III, what is called the mediaeval period of our history came to an end. The Tudor king, Henry VII, reigned over an England which, in spite of many differences, we should recognise as our own.

The invention of gunpowder had changed everything. Clumsy guns had been used at the battle of Creçy nearly one hundred and fifty years earlier, but it was after Bosworth that cannon really became effective. It was now no longer possible for the barons to defy the king.

Edward and his brother in the Tower of London.




ALFRED THE GREAT
EDWARD THE ELDER
ATHELSTAN
EDMUND THE ELDER
EDRED
EDWY
EDGAR
EDWARD THE MARTYR
ETHELRED THE UNREADY
CANUTE
EDWARD THE CONFESSOR
EDMUND IRONSIDE
HAROLD I
HARDICANUTE
Edward
WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR
Margaret m. Malcolm III of Scotland
WILLIAM II
Adela
HENRY I — m.— Matilda
STEPHEN
Matilda m. Geoffrey of Anjou
HENRY II
RICHARD I
JOHN
HENRY III
EDWARD I



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FROM ALFRED THE GREAT TO HENRY VII

Capital letters indicate those who succeeded to the throne
Bold line represents the line of succession



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